

THACKERAY'S LECTURES ON THE GEORGES.

GEORGE THE SECOND.

(Continued from the last issue of THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.)

On the afternoon of the 14th of June, 1727, two horsemen might have been perceived galloping along the road from Chelsea to Richmond. The foremost, clad in the jack-boots of the period, was a broad-faced, jolly-looking, and very comely cavalier; but, by the manner in which he urged his horse, you might see that he was a bold as well as a skilful rider. Every man loved a good bet; and, in the hunting-fields of Norfolk, no squire rode more boldly after the fox, or cheered Bluewood and Sweetlips more lustily than he who thundered over the Richmond road.

He speedily reached Richmond Lodge, and asked to see the owner of the mansion. The mistress of the house and her ladies, to whom our friend was admitted, could not be introduced to the master, however, as the business might be. The master was asleep after his dinner—he always slept after his dinner—and was to be seen only in the morning. Nevertheless, our stout friend of the jack-boots put the strictest lady aside, opened the double door of the bedroom, wherein upon the bed lay a little gentleman, and here the eager messenger knelt down in his jack-boots.

He on the bed started up, and with many oaths and a strong German accent asked, "Who was there, and who dared to disturb him?"

"I am Sir Robert Walpole," said the messenger. The awakened sleeper hated Sir Robert Walpole. "I have the honor to announce to your majesty that your royal father, King George I., died at Osnaburg on Saturday last, the 10th instant."

"That is one big lie!" roared out his sacred majesty King George II.; but Sir Robert Walpole stated the fact, and from that day until three-and-thirty years after, George, the second of the name, ruled over England.

How the king made away with his father's will under the astonished nose of the Archbishop of Canterbury; how he was a choleric little sovereign; how he shook his fist in the face of his fathers; how he kicked his coat and we about in his rages, and called every body thief, liar, rascal, with whom he differed, you will read in all the history books; and how he speedily and shrewdly reconciled himself with the bold minister whom he had hated during his father's life, and by whom he was served during fifteen years of his own with admirable prudence, fidelity, and success. But for Sir Robert Walpole, we should have had the Pretender back again. But for his obstinate love of peace, we should have had wars which the nation was not strong enough to unite enough to endure. But for his resolute councils and good-humored resistance, we might have had German despots attempting a Hanoverian reign over us; we should have had revolt, confusion, war, and tyrannical rule in place of a quarter of a century of peace, freedom, and material prosperity, such as the country never enjoyed, until that corrupter of Parliaments, that dissolute, tipsy cynic, that outrageous lover of peace and liberty, that great citizen, patriot, and statesman governed it.

But, with his father's life, and by whom he was served during fifteen years of his own with admirable prudence, fidelity, and success. But for Sir Robert Walpole, we should have had the Pretender back again. But for his obstinate love of peace, we should have had wars which the nation was not strong enough to unite enough to endure. But for his resolute councils and good-humored resistance, we might have had German despots attempting a Hanoverian reign over us; we should have had revolt, confusion, war, and tyrannical rule in place of a quarter of a century of peace, freedom, and material prosperity, such as the country never enjoyed, until that corrupter of Parliaments, that dissolute, tipsy cynic, that outrageous lover of peace and liberty, that great citizen, patriot, and statesman governed it.

It was lucky for us that our first Georges were not more high-minded men; especially for us, that they loved Hanover so much as to leave England to have her own way. Our chief troubles began when we got a king who gloried in the name of Britain, and being born in the country, proposed to rule it. He was no more fit to govern Britain than his grandfather and great-grandfather, who did not try. It was righting itself during their occupation. The dangerous, noble old spirit of cavalier loyalty was dying out; the stately old English High-Church was emptying itself of its questions, dropping, with one side and the other—the side of loyalty, prerogative, church, and king; the side of right, truth, civil and religious freedom—had set generations of brave men in arms. By the time George III. came to the throne, the combat between loyalty and liberty was come to an end; and Charles Edward, old, gray, and childless, was dying in Italy.

Those who are curious about European court history of the last age know the memoirs of the Margravine of Bayreuth, and what she tells us of Berlin, where George II.'s consorts ruled sovereign. Frederick the Great's father knocked down his sons, daughters, officers of state; he kidnapped big men all over Europe to make grandsons of his house, his parades, his wine parties, his tobacco parties, were all designed to show that he was the greatest man in the world. Jonathan Wild the Great, in language, pleasure, and behavior, is scarcely more delicate than this German sovereign. Louis XV.—his life, and reign, and doings—are told in a thousand French memoirs. Our George II., at least, was not worse king than his neighbors. He retained and took the royal exemption from doing right which sovereigns assumed. A dull little man of low tastes he appears to us in England; yet Hervey tells us that this choleric prince was a great sentimentalist, and that his letters, of which he wrote prodigious quantities, were quite dangerous in their powers of fascination. He kept his sentimentalities for his Germans and his queen. With us English he never chose to be familiar. He has been accused of avarice; yet he did not give much more than he received, and he had him. He did not love the fine arts, but he did not pretend to love them. He was no more a hypocrite about religion than his father. He judged men by a low standard; yet, with such men as were in the wrong in judging as he did? He readily offered lying and flattery, and liars and flatterers were perforce his companions. Had he been more of a dupe, he might have been more amiable. A dismal experience made him cynical. No soon was it to him to be clear-sighted, and see only what he was, and flattery round about him. What could Walpole tell him about his Loris and Commons but that they were all venal? Did not his clergy, his courtiers, bring him the same story? Dealing with men and women in his rude, typical way, he comes to doubt about honor, male and female, about patriotism, about religion. "He is wild, but he fights like a man," George I., the tactician, said of his son and successor, George II. George II. certainly had. The electoral prince, at the head of his father's contingent, had approved himself a good and brave soldier under Eugene and Marlborough. At Oudenarde he especially distinguished himself. At Malplaquet the other claimant to the English throne won but little honor. There was always a question about James' courage. Neither then in Flanders, nor afterwards in his own ancient kingdom of Scotland, did the luckless Pretender show much resolution. But dapper little George had a famous touch of the hero in him, and fought like a Trojan. He called out his brother of Prussia with sword and pistol; and I wish, for the interest of romancers in general, that that famous duel could have taken place. The two sovereigns had each other with all their might; their seconds were appointed; the place of meeting was settled; and the duel was only prevented by strong representations made to the two of the European league which would have been caused by such a transaction.

Whenever we hear of dapper George at war, it is certain that he demeaned himself like a little man of valor. At Dettingen his horse ran away with him, and with difficulty was stopped from carrying him into the enemy's lines; and he, coming from the very quadruped, was king, dismounting. "Now I know I shall not run away," and placed himself at the head of the foot, drew his sword, brandishing it at the whole French army, and calling out to his own men to

come on, in his English, but with the most famous pluck and spirit. In '45, when a Pretender was at Derby, and many people began to look upon the king never lost his courage; and he, "Pope!" don't talk to me about that!" he said, like a gallant little prince as he was, and never for one moment allowed his equality, or his business, or his pleasures, or his travels, or his position in the hat and coat he wore on the famous day of Oudenarde; and the people laughed, but kindly, at the old garment, for bravery never goes out of fashion. In private life the prince bowed himself a worthy descendant of his father. In this respect, so much has been said about the first George's manners that we need not enter into a description of the second's. In 1706 he married a princess remarkable for beauty, for cleverness, for learning, for good temper—one of the truest and fondest wives ever prince was blessed with, and who loved him and was faithful to him, and he, in coarse fashion, loved her to the last. It must be told to the honor of Caroline of Anspach, that at the time when German princes thought no more of changing their religion than you of altering your cap, she refused to give up Protestantism for the other creed, although she was afterwards to be an empress, was offered to her for a bridegroom. Her Protestant relations in Berlin were angry at her rebellious spirit; it was they who tried to convert her (it is droll to think that Frederick the Great, who had no religion at all, was known for a long time in England as the Protestant hero), and these good Protestants set upon Caroline a certain Father Urban, a very skillful Jesuit and famous winner of souls. But she routed the Jesuit, and she refused Charles VI. and she married the little Protestant Prince of Hanover, whom she tended with love and with every manner of sacrifice, with artificial kindness, with tender flattery, with entire self-devotion, and she lived until her husband's death. When George I. made his last visit to Hanover, his son was appointed regent during the royal absence. But this honor was never again conferred on the Prince of Wales; he and his father fell out presently. On the occasion of the christening of his second son, a royal row took place, and the prince, shaking his fist in the Duke of Newcastle's face, called him a rogue, and provoked his august father. He and his wife were turned out of St. James's, and their princely children taken from them, by order of the royal head of the family. Father and mother wept piteously at parting from their little ones. The young ones sent some cherries, with their love, to papa and mamma; the parents watered the fruit with tears. They had no more than thirty-five years afterwards, when Prince Frederick died, their eldest son—their new-born child.

The king called his daughter-in-law "cette diablesse madame la princesse." The frequenters of the latter's court were forbidden to appear at the king's; their royal highnesses going to Bath, we read how the courtiers followed them thither, and paid that homage in Somersetshire which was forbidden in London. That phrase of "cette diablesse madame la princesse" explains one cause of the wrath of her royal papa. She was a very clever woman; she had a keen sense of humor, and she had a droll tongue; she turned into ridicule the antiquated salutes and his hideous baren. She wrote savage letters about him home to members of her family, so driven out from the royal presence, the prince and princess set up for themselves in Leicester Fields, "where," says Walpole, "the young ladies of the young gentlemen of the next party, and the prettiest and liveliest of the young ladies, formed the new court." Besides Leicester House, they had their lodge at Richmond, frequented by some of the pleasantest company of those days. There were the Hervey, and Chesterfield, and little Mr. Pope from Twickenham, and with him sometimes the savage Dean of St. Patrick's, and quite a bevy of young ladies, whose pretty faces smile on us out of history. There was a famous, famous ballad song; and the saucy, charming Mary Bellenden, who would have none of the Prince of Wales's fine compliments, who folded her arms across her breast, and bade H. R. H. keep off; and knocked his purple of guineas into his face, and told him she was tired of seeing him count them. He was not an august monarch, this Augustus. Walpole tells how, one night at the royal card-table, the playful princesses pulled a chair away from under Lady Deloraine, who, he says, pulled the king's from under him, so that his majesty fell on the carpet. In whatever posture one sees this royal George, he is ludicrous somehow; even at Dettingen, where he fought so bravely, his figure is absurd—jailing out in his broken English, and lunging with his rapier like a fencing-master. In contemporary caricatures, George's son, "the Hero of Culloden," is also made an object of considerable fun.

I refrain to quote from Walpole regarding George, for those charming volumes are in the hands of all who love the gossip of the last century. Nothing can be more cheery than Horace's letters. Piddles sing all through them, wags, lights, fine dresses, fine jokes, fine place, fine equipages glitter and sparkle there. There was such a brilliant, jingling, snickering Vanity Fair as that of the last century. Hervey, the next great authority, is a darker spirit. About him there is something frightful; a few years since his heirs opened the lid of the lockwork box; it was as if a Pompeii was opened to the last century, dug up, with its temples and its games, its chariots, its public places—Jopani. Wandering through that city of the dead, that dreadfully selish time, through those godless intrigues and feuds, through those crowds, pushing and shoving, and through those lying and fawning—I have wanted some one to be friends with. I have said to friends conversant with that history, "Show me some good person about that Court; find me, among those selfish courtiers, those dissolute, gay people, some one being that I can love and regard." There is that strutting little saint, George II.; there is that hunchbacked, beetle-browed Lord Chesterfield; there is John Hervey, with his deadly smile, and ghastly, painted face—I hate them. The other authority, the one from one bishopric to another; yonder comes that little Mr. Pope, from Twickenham, with his friend the Irish dean, in his new cassock, bowing too, but with rage flashing from under his bushy eyebrows, and scorn and hate quivering in his eyes. Can you be fond of that? Of Pope's might; at least I might love his genius, his wit, his greatness, his sensibility, with a certain conviction that at some fancied slight, some sneer which he imagined, he would turn me to stone, or that you trust the Queen? She is not of our order; there is no position makes kings and queens lonely. One insupportable attachment that insupportable woman has. To that she is faithful, through all trials, neglect, pain, and time. Save her husband, she really loves for her own sake. There is good enough to her children, and even fond enough of them; but she would chop them all up into little pieces to please him. In her intercourse with all around her she was perfectly kind, gracious, and natural; but she may die, daughter, may depart, she will be as perfect as kind and gracious to the next set. If the King wants her, she will smile upon him, be she ever so sad; and walk with him, be she ever so weary; and laugh at his brutal jokes, be she ever so much pained by body or heart. Caroline's devotion to her husband is a prodigy to read of. What charm had the little man? What was there in those wonderful letters of thirty pages absent, which he wrote to her when he was in London with his wife? 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